



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S48. When the World Turned Upside-Down: Post-1989 Eastern Europe in English Literatures and Film

Tuesday 29 August: 2.00-4.00pm

Convenor: Kathleen Starck (University of Bremen)

Email: starck@uni-bremen.de

Co-convenor: Alyce von Rothkirch (Community University of the Valleys)

Email: alyce.vonrothkirch@newport.ac.uk

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of “socialism” not only changed the countries of the East, but they also provided new opportunities for the West to gain more direct and unmediated access to and experience of Eastern Europe. This seminar will examine depictions of post-1989 Eastern Europe in English-language literature and film, on the West’s fascination with the “Wild East” and on how “outsiders” view life after the “iron curtain” was lifted. Topics will include: change of political regimes; civil war; growing up/identity; shifting values and ideologies; new opportunities; differences between the generations; re-interpretations of history.

Bad Realism And Good Fantasy In Futile Attempt At Literary Representation In Julian Barnes’ *The Porcupine* And J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter*

Gergana Apostolova (South Western University, Bulgaria)

Why has a talented writer like Julian Barnes produced grey prose, why does a haunting story like *Harry Potter* contain caricatures of Bulgarians instead of fantastic images? What exactly do we learn about ourselves reading such books? Trying to answer these questions means going deep into the development of the texts: character types, cultural archetypes and artistic approach, ethno psychology and compatibility of text features, contextual layers of realism and fantasy. This paper focuses on three points: identity, artistic approach, and limitations of literature traced in the factual areas of character representation, contextual reconstruction of ideas and journalistic means interfering with fictional ends.

Popular Culture: a Play of Fantasy in the Shadowy Folds of Balkan History

Tsvetina Tomova (South Western University, Bulgaria)

The latest English fiction referring to Bulgaria is *The Historian* by Elizabeth Kostova. It is not high literature but it has become highly popular as an entertaining story and highly debatable as a representation of Bulgaria. *The Historian* is the story of an American family which searches to find itself in places so shady and mystic as one’s subconscious, in times so unfixed as half a millennium, in a quest for the unknown, so unfamiliar, severe, raw and fundamental as gender, bloodshed, religion and the

Balkans. Our aim is to explicate the levels of cultural representation and its perception by a Bulgarian reader.

Melting Pot or Tossed Salad (Encounters with the ‘Other’)

Irina Perianova (Economic University of Sofia)

Identity is a function of the culture/s we were born into. At the same time it involves our relation to the ‘Other’. The paper argues that our identity is fluid and shifts in different social contexts. In the complex relationship with ‘the other’ some nationalities are ‘less foreign’ to us than others, i.e. there are degrees of foreignness. Plurality of identities seems to be the norm in our globalized world in view of the migratory processes, especially after the transition in Eastern Europe. The umbrella of the so-called “overarching identity” (Eriksen) covers different components of our psyche which become submerged or salient depending on the situation.

Facing History after the “End of History”: Three Plays by David Edgar on Post-Wall Europe

Hans-Ulrich Mohr (University of Dresden)

David Edgar’s three plays *The Shape of the Table* (1990), *Pentecost* (1994) and *The Prisoner’s Dilemma* (2001) present some of the most profound investigations into the social processes that were triggered off by the fall of the iron curtain in 1989. The first tries to assess what made ‘socialist’ Eastern bloc regimes (such as – then – Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria etc.) collapse and what problems these nations had to face in creating new governments under the conditions of globalization. The second play proceeds to the Balkan and emphasizes the difficulties of founding a new state on cultural debris. Edgar points out the entangled heritage and reveals an ancient pattern of intercultural East-West communication competing with prevalent economic nationalist, religious etc. forces. The third play moves on to the Caucasian regions of the former Soviet Union and evolves the difficulties of creating governable democratic communities of cultures defined by mutual social, religious and ethnic distrust. David Edgar’s plays are definitely post-historical and postmodern in the sense that they deconstruct traditional notions of history. The ‘new’ sense of history they develop is expressed and supported by formal elements: All three are two-act plays with what one may call a *midpoint* – a device borrowed from screenwriting. These plays are concerned with reality from a metahistorical point of view. Their answers are presented as parables with a polyvalent allegorical image at the centre. With the help of such a technique the three plays provide probably one of the most intensive perspectives on the situation in Eastern Europe after the wall came down.